

The Effects of Focused and Unfocused Written Corrective Feedback on the Acquisition of EFL Grammar Knowledge and Writing Skills

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Abstract

The present study evaluated the effects of focused Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) on Japanese EFL learners' ability to use accurate grammatical forms in free writing, the effects of a combination of focused WCF and unfocused WCF, and learners' perceptions of WCF. The analyses of discrete-point grammar tests and essay writings showed that focused WCF contributed to the participants' acquisition of correct grammatical forms to a statistically significant degree and that the unfocused WCF on a variety of spontaneous errors did not undermine the effectiveness of focused WCF. Furthermore, the questionnaire survey results indicated that the participants all preferred to receive error correction, producing counterevidence against Truscott's proposal that form-focused WCF was useless and should not be provided.

Introduction

The present study explores a way to incorporate both focused and unfocused written corrective feedback (WCF) into an EFL grammar and writing course. Earlier research findings have indicated that focused WCF is more effective for improving L2 learners' ability to write accurately (Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). However, provided that learners' attention is clearly focused on the major target grammatical point, it may be more practical for the teacher to provide direct correction on a few additional grammatical, lexical, or stylistic errors. The number of paragraphs or essays that the teacher can assign to students per semester is normally limited. Therefore, providing feedback only on one particular grammatical rule does not seem to be the most efficient or economical approach to L2 teaching. This is particularly the case with EFL courses that are designed to help learners improve their general grammatical knowledge and overall writing skills at the same time.

Participants in the present project were EFL students at a Japanese university with a fairly advanced level of grammar knowledge, and the pedagogical purpose of the course was not to teach novel English grammatical rules but to refresh or consolidate their knowledge of major syntactic rules, providing additional information about the detailed features of complex rules. The course was also designed to provide participants with opportunities to

practice using the major grammatical forms through paragraph or essay writing.

One common problem with many Japanese EFL students, including English majors or high proficiency students, is that they have explicitly learned grammatical rules through meta-linguistic explanations and discrete-point grammar analysis exercises but still cannot consistently use the learned rules to assemble target-like phrases or sentences in speaking or writing activities. Writing allows L2 learners more time to carefully consider the structure of each sentence than speaking which requires instantaneous judgment and language production in real time. However, even in writing, many Japanese students, when concerned about the semantic or pragmatic content, continue to make grammatical mistakes related to such syntactic structures as the articles, relative pronouns, hypothetical conditionals, present perfect tense, and subject-verb agreement, the precise equivalents of which are absent in the grammatical system of their first language.

The first research purpose of this study is to affirm the positive effects of focused WCF on the participants' ability to use accurate grammatical forms in new pieces of writing. Truscott (1996, 1999, 2007) argued that error correction does not improve L2 writers' ability to write accurately and that it may even have harmful effects. However, this study endeavors to support the opposite position, i.e., grammar correction contributes to L2 learners' acquisition of grammatical forms in writing (Ferris, 1999, 2004, 2010). The second research purpose is to investigate the positive or negative effects of unfocused WCF on the learners' abilities to write accurately in English. Many of the studies in the past evaluated the effectiveness of WCF focused on one syntactic rule (e.g., definite and indefinite articles), but this is an action research study aimed to evaluate, and improve, the overall effectiveness of a particular university EFL course. Consequently, several different grammatical rules were covered during the semester, whereas each class session provided WCF on one rule. Additionally, unfocused WCF was given on participants' spontaneous errors related to a variety of grammatical forms.

The teacher provided focused WCF on the major target grammatical form by using an error coding system. This indirect WCF was intended to guide the participants to notice their problems and find ways to repair them, paying closer attention to the target point. The struggles that the learners experienced in the process of language production were believed to have a positive effect (Qi & Lapkin, 2001; Sachs & Polio, 2007). As for their spontaneous mistakes, the teacher directly corrected ungrammatical or reformulated awkward forms; this direct, unfocused WCF was provided to half of the participants at odd-numbered class sessions and to the other half at even-numbered sessions. Thus, although each class session covered a different grammatical rule, any possible effect of the target linguistic forms on the effectiveness of the unfocused WCF was controlled for. All participants were treated equally from an educational and ethical point of view.

The participants received explicit explanations about the target grammatical forms and

engaged in grammar analysis activities before using the forms in paragraph writing. Thus, it is acknowledged that grammar instruction as well as WCF would account for the participants' acquisition of target forms. However, explicit grammar instruction was administered to all participants at every class session, and its effects on either learner group were controlled for, although the assessment of the effects of grammar instruction *per se* was beyond the scope and nature of the present study. Nonetheless, the major point of investigation was to determine the degree to which WCF contributed to their accurate use of target forms in new pieces of writing. A within-subjects statistical analysis was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the two treatments: (a) focused WCF and (b) a combination of focused WCF and unfocused WCF.

At the end of the semester, a questionnaire survey was conducted to probe the participants' perceptions of focused and unfocused WCF provided during the semester. The survey was intended to determine what types of instructional treatment learners prefer so that future teaching plans could be modified to accommodate their preferences. Ferris (1995) and Hyland (2011) demonstrated that the participants attended to, and appreciated, their teachers' feedback on grammatical errors, whereas Truscott (1996) argued that what learners believe to be the best for their learning often differs from what can really help their learning and objected to the idea of providing grammatical error correction in accord with their preference. The present study strove to support the former position in this respect.

Literature Review

This section reviews the two opposing views concerning the use of error correction, the effects of focused and unfocused WCF on L2 learners' accuracy in writing, and the comparison between direct and indirect types of WCF.

Feedback or No Feedback

The first major controversy concerning WCF was whether or not correction of grammatical errors can facilitate language acquisition. Truscott (1996, 1999) claimed that grammar correction does not improve L2 learners' ability to write accurately in the least and proposed the policy of abandoning it. Truscott also pointed out that there is a developmental sequence for grammar acquisition and that instruction is not effective unless learners are ready for a certain form; unfortunately, very few teachers can determine their students' current developmental stages and provide feedback on the right grammatical item at the right timing. Furthermore, even if the teacher can recognize and explain an error, students may not understand the explanation. His objection to provision of grammar correction was also based on the fact that grammar correction overly burdens both the teacher and students. Teachers waste an enormous amount of time correcting their students' errors, which could be, otherwise, invested for teaching discourse construction or providing

content-based feedback. Learners do not feel comfortable confronting the indication of mistakes and, for fear of making mistakes, may avoid writing longer or more complex sentences. Truscott's position was that grammar correction has no role to play in language acquisition.

Ferris (1999) protested against Truscott's proposal, stating that his theorizing was premature and overly strong. She proposed, instead, that selective, prioritized, and explicit types of error correction might be effective. In her opinions, teachers could train to recognize and correct grammatical errors, and they might continue to provide grammar correction until further studies revealed more decisive evidence for or against error correction. Ferris (2004) further argued that the existing research base, although insufficient for decisive conclusions, predicted positive effects of error correction on L2 writing and that the teachers should make the best of the existing body of knowledge and continue to provide WCF. She also stated that teachers could deepen their grammar knowledge and choose the most appropriate form of direct or indirect error correction depending on their students' needs, goals, and individual differences.

Studies in Support of the Non-instruction Policy

In order to support his non-instruction policy (i.e., not providing grammatical error correction), Truscott (1996) cited the studies by Semke (1984), Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986), Kepner (1991), and Sheppard (1992). Semke (1984) conducted a 10-week longitudinal study with 141 American university students studying German as a foreign language (GFL) to evaluate the effects of error correction on writing accuracy. The participants were divided into four groups and received four different types of feedback on their free writings: (a) direct error correction, (b) comments and questions on the content, (c) direct correction and positive comments, and (d) indirect corrective feedback using codes. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference among the four groups in terms of writing accuracy. Those who received direct error correction did not perform any better than those who received content-based comments. The comment-only group expressed a more positive attitude concerning their writing experiences.

Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) evaluated the effectiveness of direct or indirect feedback with 134 Japanese college students. The participants were divided into four groups and received four different types of WCF: (a) direct correction, (b) coded feedback, (c) highlighted feedback, or (d) indication of the number of errors per line. The results showed that direct correction did not result in greater accuracy, fluency, or complexity in the participants' writing. Instead, all groups produced more complex structures over time as they continued to practice writing.

Kepner (1991) recruited 60 intermediate L2 Spanish learners at an American college and evaluated the effects of *type* of written feedback (error corrections or message-related

comments) and English *verbal ability* (higher or lower) on their acquisition of writing skills in Spanish. The participants were divided into four groups depending on (a) their verbal-ability levels and (b) the types of feedback they received. They engaged in eight journal writing tasks, and error-correction feedback was administered to two subgroups, and message-related comments were provided to the other two subgroups. One of the two subgroups receiving either treatment included higher verbal-ability students, and the other included lower verbal-ability students. The two-way ANOVA results showed that those who received message-related feedback produced a significantly greater number of higher-level propositions in their journal writing and that the higher-verbal-ability writers consistently outperformed the lower-verbal-ability writers in productivity. On the other hand, those who received error-correction feedback did not gain significantly greater accuracy than those who received message-related feedback regardless of their verbal-ability.

Sheppard (1992) evaluated the effects of form-focused feedback and meaning-focused feedback on ESL learners' acquisition of writing skills. He recruited 26 ESL students with various L1 backgrounds and provided one subgroup ($n=13$) with form-focused feedback on grammatical points and the other subgroup ($n=13$) with holistic feedback on meaning. The results showed that the meaning-focused group made a significant progress from pretest to posttest in verb accuracy and punctuation. The form-focused group made a significant progress in accuracy but tended to avoid subordination as a complex and difficult sentence structure.

Truscott (2007) further conducted a small-scale meta-analysis based on the results of six earlier researchers' controlled experiments (including the four studies above mentioned) and six additional studies that did not involve a control group but, instead, measured pretest-to-posttest gains that the grammar-correction recipients attained. He compared the effect sizes for the cited studies and produced evidence that grammar correction was likely to have a small harmful effect on L2 writers' abilities to write accurately and that any possible benefits were minimal.

Summing up, the findings from these studies suggested that error correction does not improve L2 learners' accuracy in writing to a significant degree, and learners who receive content-based feedback tend to produce more complex or ideationally better sentences and receive a positive impression of writing activities. The implication is that the role that grammar correction might play for language acquisition is minimal, if there is any.

Theories and Studies in Support of the Provision of Error Correction

First of all, Truscott's theorizing contradicts the function of focus-on-form instruction. Eskey (1983) pointed out that, although communicative language teaching facilitates learners' fluency, it does not automatically increase formal accuracy. With the growing popularity of the communicative approach, there had been a general shift from the emphasis

on structural accuracy to the development of functional skills that were needed for communicating ideas. However, fluent L2 speakers and writers often lacked grammatical accuracy, showing that the acquisition of communicative competence did not guarantee their native-like use of the target forms. When greater accuracy is demanded of L2 learners in the real world (e.g. writing for professional purposes, instead of engaging in daily oral interactions), corrective feedback from the teacher is indispensable. This has also been evidenced by the fact that French immersion students in Canada, who had sufficient opportunities for output, could not produce complex sentence structures unless they were provided with negative feedback (Swain, 1985) or the report that focus-on-form tasks successfully drew immersion students' attention to their errors and consequently improve the quality of their writing (Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

There are a number of empirical studies that provide evidence for the effectiveness of grammar correction. Sheen (2007) recruited 91 ESL learners in the United States and evaluated the effects of two types of focused WCF (direct error correction with metalinguistic feedback and direct correction only) on their acquisition of the English articles. The results showed that the learners who received error correction outperformed those who did not, and the direct correction with metalinguistic feedback was particularly effective for long-term acquisition.

Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) engaged 53 adult migrant students in New Zealand in writing tasks over an extended period and evaluated the effects of two different types of WCF ((a) explicit explanation of grammatical errors and suggestions for changes and (b) explicit explanation and suggestions combined with student-teacher individual conferences) on the participants' abilities to use three different grammatical rules (prepositions, the simple past tense, and the definite article). The learners who received either type of WCF outperformed those who received no feedback. The results also indicated that the explicit feedback with individual conferences had a significantly positive effect on learners' accuracy with the definite article and the past tense, which were rule-governed linguistic features.

Likewise, Bitchener and his colleagues conducted a series of studies on the effectiveness of focused WCF on L2 learners' acquisition of the English article system (definite and indefinite articles) and provided positive evidence. Bitchener (2008) engaged 75 low-intermediate ESL learners in New Zealand in written picture-description tasks and investigated the effects of WCF on their acquisition of the articles. He divided the group into four groups and provided the three experimental groups with (a) direct error correction with written and oral meta-linguistic explanation, (b) direct error correction with written explanation, or (c) direct error correction only. The control group did not receive any feedback. The participants produced three pieces of writing describing the provided pictures. The results showed all three experimental groups gained greater accuracy at immediate

posttest than the control group and retained the high level of performance at delayed posttest, evidencing that error correction was effective and worth the teacher's time and effort.

Bitchener and Knoch (2008) conducted a similar ESL study with 75 international visa students and 69 migrant students. The experimental treatments included (a) direct error correction, written meta-cognitive explanation, and oral explanation, (b) direct error correction and written meta-linguistic explanation, and (c) direct error correction only. All three experimental groups outperformed the control group at the immediate posttest and at the delayed posttest administered seven weeks later. There was no statistical difference between the migrant and international students' accuracy in writing.

Bitchener and Knoch (2009a) evaluated the effectiveness of three different types of focused WCF with 52 low-intermediate ESL students in New Zealand. The three treatments were: (a) direct error correction, written meta-linguistic explanation, and oral explanation, (b) direct correction and written meta-linguistic explanation, and (c) direct error correction only. All experimental groups outperformed the control group at the immediate posttest and the three delayed posttests administered two, six, or 10 months after the treatment.

Bitchener and Knoch (2009b) also conducted a longitudinal study with 52 low-intermediate ESL learners in New Zealand to compare the effectiveness of: (a) written meta-linguistic explanation, (b) written meta-linguistic explanation followed by an oral form-focused review of the written explanation, (c) and indication of erroneous parts in the form of circling. The participants were divided into three experimental groups, receiving one of the three forms of feedback, and a control group. All three experimental groups outperformed the control group at the immediate posttest and at the three delayed tests. There were no significant differences among the three experimental groups.

Bitchener and Knoch (2010) investigated the effects of WCF on 63 advanced ESL learners' accurate use of the definite and indefinite articles. The participants, ESL learners in the United States, received: (a) written meta-linguistic explanation and an oral form-focused review of the same explanation, (b) written meta-linguistic explanation, or (c) error circling. The control group did not receive any feedback. The groups that received written meta-linguistic explanation with or without an oral form-focused review achieved significantly greater accuracy at the immediate and delayed posttests eight weeks later. The group that received error circling was able to increase its accuracy at immediate posttest, but its accuracy level decreased afterward. The control group did not make any statistically significant progress.

The overall implications of these studies are that L2 learners who receive error correction are likely to learn to use grammatical forms more accurately than those who do not, and explicit explanations tend to reinforce the effectiveness of direct error correction.

Focused or Unfocused

On the assumption that WCF has a role to play in language acquisition, one of the controversial issues is whether feedback should be focused on one grammatical rule or provided on multiple linguistic errors that learners make spontaneously.

Sheen (2007), Bitchener (2008), and Bitchener and Knoch (2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010), as above mentioned, investigated the effectiveness of focused WCF; all of these studies evaluated learners' acquisition of the English article system. The results indicated that experimental groups receiving focused WCF in various forms (e.g., direct error correction, written meta-linguistic input, or oral meta-linguistic input) consistently outperformed the control group that received no feedback. Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) also evaluated the effects of focused WCF (explicit written feedback and teacher-student conference, explicit feedback only, and no feedback) on three different grammatical forms (the definite article, the simple past tense, and prepositions) and revealed that the rule-governed features were more amenable to WCF.

Studies that investigated the effects of focused and unfocused corrective feedback (CF) at the same time have been scarce. Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008) engaged a group of 35 Japanese EFL students in narrative writing tasks and measured the effects of focused and unfocused WCF on their accurate use of grammatical rules in English. The first experimental group received WCF only on the definite and indefinite articles, and the second experimental group received feedback on several different grammatical forms. The results showed that both made a significant improvement from pretest to posttest and also outperformed the control group that received no feedback. However, the study did not indicate whether focused feedback is more effective than unfocused feedback or vice versa.

Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) evaluated the effects of WCF on 80 ESL learners' acquisition of grammatical forms at a US college. The participants were divided into four groups: Focused Written CF Group received direct WCF only on the English articles; Unfocused Written CF Group received feedback on the articles along with other grammatical structures (i.e., copular *be*, regular past tense, irregular past tense, and prepositions); Writing Practice Group engaged in writing practice but received no feedback, and; Control Group only took the tests. The results showed that focused WCF could contribute to grammatical accuracy in L2 writing but unfocused WCF was not as pedagogically useful as writing practice itself.

Truscott and Hsu (2008) provided unfocused WCF to EFL students in Taiwan to demonstrate that the provided feedback was ineffective. However, the form of feedback they provided (simply underlining the incorrect parts) was at the extreme end of indirect WCF, and there is a possibility that a somewhat more explicit type of unfocused WCF might have facilitated L2 writers' accuracy.

Whereas a great number of studies have demonstrated that focused WCF is effective,

studies that have compared the effects of focused and unfocused WCF directly are scarce, and the evidence against unfocused WCF is not sufficient and decisive. The roles and effectiveness of unfocused WCF need to be further investigated.

Types of Feedback: Direct and Indirect Feedback

Many studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of indirect WCF by experimentally utilizing different forms of indirect feedback, whereas some studies have reported the positive functions of direct error correction as well.

Lalande (1982) theorized that it is pedagogically more beneficial to guide learners systematically to notice their own errors and discover the correct forms, instead of providing direct error corrections. He divided a group of intermediate German-as-a-Foreign-Language learners ($N=60$) into two subgroups: the experimental group had their errors marked with codes, and the comparison group received direct error correction. The error-coding group gained greater accuracy overall than the direct-correction group. The indirect-WCF group also learned to use *case*—the most difficult grammatical rule among all target forms—accurately in a new piece of writing. The study results suggested that the error-awareness and problem-solving techniques that indirect WCF induced had a positive effect on intermediate GFL students' final writing.

Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986), above mentioned, evaluated the effects of direct and indirect WCF on Japanese college students' writings. The results indicated that more direct feedback did not result in greater accuracy, fluency, or complexity in L2 writing. Semke (1984) also compared direct and indirect WCF, as well as content-based feedback, but the results did not produce any evidence to suggest that either one is more effective.

Chandler (2003) investigated the effectiveness of four types of WCF: direct correction, underlining with description of an error type, underlining only, and description only. Participants were 36 ESL students in the United States. The results indicated that direct correction and underlining were significantly more effective than the description of an error type for improving the learners' accuracy in a subsequent writing assignment. The participants seemed to receive less discouragement from underlining than from the description of error types. However, they felt that they learned more from self-correction based on the error-type descriptions. One possible interpretation of Chandler's study is that the indication of an error—either directly correcting it or simply indicating its location—can effectively improve learners' accuracy in new writing tasks, but the learners might be motivated to learn the target structure when provided with chances to reflect on their own errors.

Van Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken (2012) investigated the effects of direct correction and indirect WCF on L2 Dutch learners' abilities to edit their drafts and to write accurately on a new topic ($N=268$). Experimental Group 1 received direct correction, Experimental

Group 2 received indirect corrective feedback using the error coding system, Control Group 1 received no feedback and self-edited their writings, and Control Group 2 received no feedback and engaged in a completely new writing task. The results showed that direct correction resulted in grammatical accuracy gains (e.g., abilities to produce syntactically correct forms involving articles, inflections, word order, etc.), and indirect CF resulted in improving non-grammatical accuracy gains (e.g., related to lexis, pragmatics, orthography).

Sheen (2007), Bitchener (2008), and Bitchener and Knoch (2008, 2009a, 2009b), above mentioned, compared the functions of direct correction with or without written meta-linguistic feedback and/or oral explanation. The general tendency was that the written meta-linguistic feedback made a major contribution, suggesting that somewhat explicit explanation of a target form reinforces the effects of direct correction on language acquisition. Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) and Bitchener and Knoch (2010) also produced evidence to support this view.

The findings from these studies were mixed, reflecting the varying effects of different types of indirect WCF administered in different teaching environments. One important point to note, however, is that the indirect WCF is likely to involve L2 learners in cognitive processing, which is likely to facilitate their language acquisition. On the other hand, it must also be acknowledged that both direct error correction and indirect WCF have roles to play, helping to improve different aspects of learners' writing abilities.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

All participants received explicit grammar instruction as part of the course work, which might have partially contributed to their acquisition of grammatical forms. Considering this teaching environment, the following four research questions were put forward.

Research Question 1: Does a combination of explicit grammar instruction and focused WCF improve the participants' knowledge of grammatical rules as measured in a discrete-point grammar test?

Hypothesis 1: The administration of grammar instruction and focused WCF improves their knowledge of grammatical rules.

Research Question 2: Does focused WCF facilitate the participants' accurate use of grammatical rules in free writing?

Hypothesis 2: Focused WCF facilitates their accurate use of target grammatical rules in free writing.

Research Question 3: How does unfocused WCF affect the effectiveness of focused WCF?

There is no a priori hypothesis for Research Question 3. Unfocused WCF on a variety

of grammatical forms may influence the effects of focused WCF either positively or negatively.

Research Question 4: How do the participants perceive the provision of focused and unfocused WCF on paragraph writings?

Research Question 4 is explorative, and there is no a priori hypothesis for this question, either.

Method

Participants

Participants were 29 third-year students enrolled at a Japanese university: their explicit knowledge of English grammar could be regarded as advanced by Japanese university students' standards. Nine were female, and 20 were male. They had already received two years of EFL training at the university in addition to six years of focus-on-forms-oriented EFL education in junior high school and high school. None of them had an experience of staying and/or studying in an English-speaking country for a year or longer. The class met once a week for a 90-minute session.

Instructional Treatment

Classroom activities. The course in which the participants enrolled was an elective linguistics course, designed primarily to deepen their understanding of English grammar. Thus, each class session began with grammar analysis activities. The teacher (the researcher himself) handed out a worksheet that presented grammar questions and guided the participants to answer them in class. He offered meta-linguistic explanations for what he assumed to be difficult features of the target grammatical rule. The major grammatical rules covered during the experimental period included: definite and indefinite articles, countable nouns and uncountable nouns, present perfect, passive voice, the verbs *let* and *make*, relative pronouns, hypothetical conditionals, reported speech, and infinitives and gerunds. Each class session covered one of these grammatical forms.

After the controlled grammar analysis exercises, the participants practiced using the target grammatical form through paragraph writing. They first received the prompt for the writing task and, as a pre-writing activity, engaged in a small-group discussion to share interesting ideas. For example, for the present perfect tense, the writing task required them to refer to five academic, athletic, or real-life goals that they had accomplished since they entered the university (e.g., *I have participated in two intercollegiate tennis tournaments; I have gotten my driver's license after attending a driving school for three months; I have attained an 800 TOEIC score.*). Members of each group recounted their own experiences so that they could share ideas for paragraph composition. They were encouraged to carry out

their discussion in English but were allowed to switch to Japanese when they could not fully express their ideas in the target language. Then, a representative of each group was called upon to report the generated ideas back to the class in English. All participants made notes for their own writings, took their notes home to write their paragraphs, and typed up and submitted the text to the teacher at the next class session.

Written corrective feedback. As for the target grammatical rule, the teacher provided participants with focused WCF using a coding system. A table of codes used for WCF was distributed at the beginning of the semester (e.g., *VT* for a verb-tense problem, *WC* for wrong word choice, *WO* for wrong word order, *SV-agr* for a subject-verb agreement problem); the teacher orally explained some of the codes that were likely to be used frequently. When weekly paragraphs were submitted, he underlined the ungrammatical parts and used codes to indicate the error types. Regarding the target grammatical rule, the correct forms that the participants used were circled as positive feedback, as was indicated at the beginning of the course. The participants were encouraged to produce informative and interesting paragraphs while trying to use the target grammatical forms, instead of mechanically constructing target linguistic structures. They received one grade on the grammar usage (*grammar* grade) and another on the overall organization, vocabulary, and content (*composition* grade).

In order to evaluate how the additional direct WCF on a variety of lexical or grammatical forms might influence the participants' attention to the major target syntactic rule—either positively or negatively—the teacher alternately provided half of the participants with unfocused WCF. The class was divided into two subgroups: Group A and Group B. Group A received WCF on all grammatical mistakes at odd-numbered class sessions, i.e., in addition to focused WCF, whereas Group B received only focused feedback on the major target form. Then, Group B received WCF on all errors at even-numbered class sessions while Group A received only focused feedback.

The instructional process was composed of three steps, including instruction, submission, and feedback, and extended over a period of three weeks (i.e., three class sessions). However, every week, the class proceeded to study a new grammatical rule so that the intervals between different topics were efficiently utilized.

As mentioned above, many of the earlier studies have indicated that focused WCF is generally more effective than unfocused WCF for the long-term acquisition of grammatical forms. However, there has been no strong evidence that giving feedback on other grammatical forms reduces the effectiveness of focused WCF.

Testing

Discrete-point grammar tests. A pretest-posttest design was used to measure the participants' knowledge of the target grammatical rules. At the beginning of the semester, a

pretest, which comprised multiple-choice question items related to all of the major grammatical rules to be covered during the semester, was administered to measure the participants' base knowledge. The same test was administered at the end of the semester to measure their gains; the question items were scrambled and mixed with a few distractors to prevent any possible test effect. Because of class administration constraints, it was not possible to administer a delayed posttest.

Essay writing. The participants wrote a preliminary essay and a final essay, which was intended to determine the degree to which their overall writing skills and their ability to use the target grammatical forms accurately in free writing improved. The participants wrote the preliminary and final essays on new topics. As Bitchener and Ferris (2012) stated, L2 writers' ability to edit and polish their drafts does not automatically translate into language acquisition and that it is important to evaluate the accuracy with which they produce new pieces of writing. The extent to which the participants gained accuracy over a four-month period was measured. Whereas the participants wrote and submitted 10 weekly paragraphs during the semester, eight of them were used for analysis; the first assignment was intended as a warm-up assignment and all participants received both focused and unfocused WCF on the last weekly essay.

The effects of unfocused WCF were not directly measured. Instead, the means for the grammatical items on which the participants received only focused WCF and those for the items on which they received both focused and unfocused WCF were compared. If the means for the focused-WCF-only were significantly greater, it would mean that the unfocused WCF might have interfered with participants' concentration on the main target grammatical forms. On the other hand, if the means for the focused-and-unfocused-WCF were greater, there was a possibility that additional WCF on a variety of forms had a positive effect. If there was no significant difference, it might mean that the additional unfocused feedback was neither beneficial nor harmful.

Questionnaire survey. In addition to the objective grammar tests and the essay tests, a questionnaire survey was conducted at the end of the semester to fathom their positive or negative perceptions of focused or unfocused WCF.

The participants were asked:

- a. whether or not they preferred to have their grammatical errors corrected;
- b. (if *yes* on (a)) what types of errors they wanted the teacher to correct;
- c. (if *yes* on (a)) to what extent they wanted the teacher to correct the errors;
- d. (if *yes* on (a)) what types of corrective feedback they preferred (e.g., direct error correction, coded feedback, meta-linguistic explanation);
- e. (if *no* on (a)) why they preferred not to have their errors corrected, and;
- f. how often they reviewed the written corrective feedback from the teacher.

Results

t-Test Results

In order to evaluate the effects of WCF on the participants' acquisition of explicit grammar knowledge (Research Question 1), their means for the preliminary and final grammar tests (i.e., pretest and posttest) were compared. The participants' raw scores at pretest and posttest were converted into Rasch measures using the partial credit Rasch model. Rasch measures are more useful for accurate statistical measurement than raw scores because they are equal-interval measures that are derived from the probabilistic relationships between person abilities and item difficulties (Bond & Fox, 2007). The Rasch person measures were further converted to response probability units (CHIPS). This linear transformation meant that the average person measure was set at 50, and the highest and lowest possible scores were respectively 80 and 20. The item separation was 2.76, which was above the criterion point of 2.00, and the item reliability was 0.88, which was very close to the criterion point of 0.90. As shown in Table 1, the pretest mean was 51.02 ($SD=1.81$), and the posttest mean was 55.74 ($SD=2.74$).

Then, a *t*-test was conducted to determine the degree of statistical significance. The independent variable was *test* (i.e., pretest and posttest), and the dependent variables were the participants' scores on the discrete-point grammar tests administered at the beginning and the end of the semester. The results showed that the participants' scores improved significantly from pretest to posttest, $t(24)=7.73$, $p=0.001$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Discrete-Point Grammar Test Results

Pretest	<i>M</i>		51.02
	95% CI	Lower Bound	50.27
		Higher Bound	51.77
	<i>SD</i>		1.81
	Skewness		0.10
	<i>SES</i>		0.46
	Kurtosis		−0.70
	<i>SEK</i>		0.90
Posttest	<i>M</i>		55.74
	95% CI	Lower Bound	54.61
		Higher Bound	56.87
	<i>SD</i>		2.74
	Skewness		0.15
	<i>SES</i>		0.46
	Kurtosis		−0.53
	<i>SEK</i>		0.90

Note. $N=25$.

Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results

In order to evaluate the overall effects of WCF on the participants' abilities to write more accurately in free writing (Research Question 2), the participants' gains in *grammar* grades and *composition* grades on essay writing were measured, and a two-way repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

Obligatory context analysis was used to compute the participants' *grammar* grades. The number of correctly formed phrases or sentences in each individual writer's essay was divided by the total number of obligatory contexts where the use of the target form was required. Regarding the overall *composition* grades, the researcher and another experienced EFL teacher holistically graded the participants' preliminary and final essays on a 5-point scale. The criteria for judgment included content, vocabulary, organization, mechanics, and grammar (related to the use of all grammatical rules other than the major target form), but each of the two raters gave one holistic score on each participant's essay. The inter-rater reliability was $r=0.89$, $p<0.01$, and the raters negotiated over, and adjusted, the grades on which they had not agreed.

As shown in Table 2, the *grammar* mean for preliminary essay writing was 3.08 ($SD=0.65$) and the *grammar* mean for final essay writing was 3.96 ($SD=0.75$). The *composition* mean for preliminary essay writing was 2.46 ($SD=0.66$), and the *composition* mean for final essay writing was 3.50 ($SD=0.66$). There were noticeable gains in both writing-skill categories.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Grammar and Composition Grades for Preliminary and Final Essays

			Grammar	Composition
Preliminary Essay	<i>M</i>		3.08	2.46
	95% CI	Lower Bound	2.81	2.18
		Higher Bound	3.36	2.74
	<i>SD</i>		0.65	0.66
	Skewness		−0.08	0.17
	<i>SES</i>		0.47	0.47
	Kurtosis		−0.42	0.05
	<i>SEK</i>		0.92	0.92
Final Essay	<i>M</i>		3.96	3.50
	95% CI	Lower Bound	3.64	3.22
		Higher Bound	4.28	3.78
	<i>SD</i>		0.75	0.66
	Skewness		0.00	0.07
	<i>SES</i>		0.47	0.47
	Kurtosis		0.00	−0.81
	<i>SEK</i>		0.92	0.92

Note. $N=24$.

Subsequently, a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to determine whether or not the gains were statistically significant. The within-subjects factors were *test* with two levels (preliminary essay and final essay) and *skill category* with two levels (grammar and composition). The dependent variables were the participants' grades for either writing-skill category at preliminary and final essay writing. The univariate test results (Table 3) showed that the *test* main effect was significant, $F(1, 23)=59.94$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.72$, the *skill category* main effect was significant, $F(1, 23)=19.15$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.45$. The *test* x *skill* category interaction was not significant, $F(1, 23)=0.41$, $p>0.05$, $\eta^2=0.02$. That is, regardless of writing-skill category (reflected in *grammar* and *composition* grades), the participants' scores improved to a statistically significant degree at the end of the experimental period. They learned to write more accurately and produce ideationally and organizationally better writings. The participants' *grammar* grades were higher than their *composition* grades, which was not surprising because the target grammatical forms had been explicitly taught before writing tasks. However, as the *grammar* and *composition* grades were computed on different scales independently from each other, the *grammar-composition* difference per se should be interpreted cautiously. Nonetheless, it was important to confirm that the participants learned to write ideationally and organizationally better essays over the semester, not assembling the target sentence structures mechanically.

Table 3. Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results (Univariate)

Effect	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Test	1	22.04	22.04	59.94	0.001	0.72
Residual	23	8.46	0.37			
Grades	1	7.04	7.04	19.15	0.001	0.45
Residual	23	8.46	0.37			
Test x Grades	1	0.17	0.17	0.41	0.53	0.02
Residual	23	9.33	0.41			

Note. $\alpha=0.05$.

ANCOVA Results

The effectiveness of the focused WCF and that of the focused and unfocused WCF combined (Research Question 3) were evaluated by comparing the participants' essay scores for the grammatical items on which they had received *focused and unfocused WCF (focused-and-unfocused)* during the semester and those for the grammatical items on which they had received *focused WCF only (focused-only)*. In other words, the participants' abilities to use the target grammatical forms in final essay writing were reanalyzed by dividing the target items into those to which they might have paid exclusive attention on the one hand and those to which they might have paid somewhat less attention on the other hand. *Focused-*

and-unfocused and *focused-only* scores were computed based on the same participants' preliminary and final essays above mentioned but were, for more accurate assessment, converted into Rasch measures, using the dichotomous model. The Rasch measures were further transformed into response probability units. The item separation was 3.12, and the item reliability was 0.91.

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics. The *focused-and-unfocused* mean for preliminary essay was 48.65 ($SD=6.46$); the *focused-only* mean was 49.02 ($SD=5.17$). The *focused-and-unfocused* mean for final essay was 52.47 ($SD=6.42$); the *focused-only* mean was 53.89 ($SD=5.95$). The *focused-only* means were slightly higher both at the beginning and the end of the semester.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the Two Treatments' Effects

			Focused + Unfocused	Focused Only
Preliminary Essay	<i>M</i>		48.65	49.02
	95% CI	Lower Bound	45.93	46.83
		Higher Bound	51.38	51.20
	<i>SD</i>		6.46	5.17
	Skewness		-0.41	-0.24
	<i>SES</i>		0.47	0.47
	Kurtosis		-0.70	-0.49
	<i>SEK</i>		0.918	0.92
Final Essay	<i>M</i>		52.47	53.89
	95% CI	Lower Bound	49.76	51.38
		Higher Bound	55.18	56.40
	<i>SD</i>		6.42	5.95
	Skewness		-0.69	0.07
	<i>SES</i>		0.47	0.47
	Kurtosis		-0.02	-0.81
	<i>SEK</i>		0.92	0.92

Note. $N=24$.

The participants' gains between preliminary essay and final essay were evaluated by performing a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The independent variable, *treatment*, included two levels: *focused-and-unfocused-WCF* and *focused-WCF-only*. The dependent variable was the participants' scores on the final essay, and the covariate was their WCF scores on the preliminary essay. A preliminary analysis evaluating the homogeneity-of-slopes assumption indicated that the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable did not differ significantly as a function of the independent variable, $F(1, 44)$, $p=0.86$, $\eta^2=0.001$. The ANCOVA was not significant, $F(1, 45)=0.58$, $p=0.45$, $\eta^2=0.013$. Whereas the participants' mean after receiving focused WCF only was slightly higher than

their mean after receiving focused and unfocused WCF, the two means did not differ significantly, suggesting that the additional feedback on a variety of grammatical forms did not interfere with learners' concentration on the major target form.

Questionnaire Survey Results

The results of the questionnaire survey were analyzed to understand the participants' perceptions of teacher feedback (Research Question 4). Two students were absent at the last class meeting when the survey was conducted, and the *N*-size was reduced to 27. Table 5 summarizes the participants' responses to the question items.

Table 5. *Questionnaire Survey Results*

Question	Number of Responses
Preference for Receiving WCF	
Prefer	27
Do Not Prefer	0
Types of Errors They Want the Teacher to Correct	
Grammatical Errors	27
Awkward Expressions	26
Paragraph Construction Problems	11
Spellings	14
Punctuation	8
Japanese-English Expressions	9
Extent of Correction They Prefer	
All Errors	21
Focused Grammatical Form(s) Only	2
2 or 3 Items	0
4 or 5 Items	0
A Limited Number of Items If There Are Many	4
Form of Error Correction	
Direct Correction	18
Using Codes	0
Underlining	6
Indicating the Number of Errors	0
Describing Error Types in the Margin	2
Reformulation	3
The Number of Times They Review the Feedback	
Never	0
Once	14
Two or More Times	10

Note. *N*=27.

First of all, it is noteworthy that all of the 27 participants answered that they wanted to receive WCF and that all of them indicated that they wished to have their grammatical errors to be corrected. Almost all participants (26 out of 27) also referred to awkward expressions (including incorrect choice of words or idioms) as another major error category on which they preferred to receive teacher feedback. As for the other categories (i.e., paragraphing problems, spellings, punctuation, the use of Japanese-English expressions), there were noticeable individual differences, although each category was chosen by eight to 14 people. The chi-square test indicated that there was a significant difference among the six items, $\chi^2=22.92$, $p=0.001$. Table 6 shows the pairwise comparison results.

Table 6. *Chi-square Tests Results: Items for Correction*

Pairwise Comparison	Observed Frequency		Expected Frequency	χ^2	p
Grammar vs. Awkward Expressions	Gr. 27	Awk. 26	26.5	0.19	0.891
Grammar vs. Paragraphing	Gr. 27	Par. 11	19	6.74	0.009
Grammar vs. Spelling	Gr. 27	Sp. 14	20.5	4.12	0.042
Grammar vs. Punctuation	Gr. 27	Punc. 8	17.5	10.31	0.001*
Grammar vs. Japanese English	Gr. 27	Jap. 9	18	9	0.003*
Awkward vs. Paragraphing	Awk. 26	Par. 11	18.5	6.08	0.014
Awkward vs. Spelling	Awk. 26	Sp. 14	20	3.6	0.058
Awkward vs. Punctuation	Awk. 26	Punc. 8	17	9.53	0.002*
Awkward vs. Japanese English	Awk. 26	Jap. 9	17.5	8.26	0.004*
Paragraphing vs. Spelling	Par. 11	Sp. 14	12.5	0.36	0.549
Paragraphing vs. Punctuation	Par. 11	Punc. 8	9.5	0.47	0.491
Paragraphing vs. Japanese English	Par. 11	Jap. 9	10	0.2	0.655
Spelling vs. Punctuation	Sp. 14	Punc. 8	11	1.636	0.201
Spelling vs. Japanese English	Sp. 14	Jap. 9	11.5	1.087	0.297
Punctuation vs. Japanese English	Punc. 8	Jap. 9	8.5	0.059	0.808

Note. $\alpha=0.05$. *=significant after Holm's Sequential Bonferroni adjustment.

Regarding the form of feedback, as many as 18 participants answered that they preferred direct correction. No one indicated their preference for the use of a coding system. Six students preferred underlining or other forms of orthographic enhancement, and two preferred margin notes explaining the error type, and three preferred provision of alternative or reformulated phrases or sentences. The chi-square test result indicated there was a significant difference among the four types, $\chi^2=22.45$, $p=0.001$. The results of pairwise comparison are shown in Table 7; it is evident that the target student group preferred direct error correction.

Table 7. Chi-Square Test Results: Types of Feedback

Pairwise Comparison	Observed Frequency		Expected Frequency	χ^2	p
Direct Correction vs. Highlighting	DC 18	H 6	12	6	0.14
Direct Correction vs. Error Type Description	DC 18	ETD 2	10	12.8	0.000*
Direct Correction vs. Reformulation	DC 18	Ref. 3	10.5	10.71	0.001*
Highlighting vs. Error Type Description	H 6	ETD 2	4	2	0.157
Highlighting vs. Reformulation	H 6	Ref. 3	4.5	1	0.317
Error Type Description vs. Reformulation	ETD 2	Ref. 3	2.5	0.02	0.655

Note. $\alpha=0.05$. * =significant after Holm’s Sequential Bonferroni adjustment.

As for their efforts to pay attention to the teacher feedback, 14 answered that they would review the feedback once, and 10 answered that they would reflect on it two or more times. The chi-square test results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between these two groups, $\chi^2=0.67$, $p=0.41$. No one said that they never paid attention to the feedback. Three participants did not respond to this question, either unable to decide or not seriously concerned about the feedback in spite of the fact that all participants answered they preferred the teacher to correct their errors.

Discussion

The first research question was related to the effects of a combination of explicit grammar instruction and focused WCF on the participants’ acquisition of grammatical rules. The results of discrete-point grammar tests showed that there was a significant gain in the participants’ posttest scores, supporting the hypothesis that predicted the positive effects of the grammar teaching, weekly paragraph writing, and WCF on their explicit grammar knowledge.

The second research question was concerned with the effects of WCF on the participants’ ability to use grammatical rules accurately in free writing. The repeated-measures ANOVA results showed that their *grammar* grades improved significantly from preliminary essay to final essay; thus, the second hypothesis that WCF would have a positive effect was also supported. It is important to notice that their *composition* grades also improved from preliminary essay to final essay, evidence that the participants were engaged in meaning-focused composition tasks, instead of mechanically trying to assemble the target linguistic structures as required by the tasks.

Truscott (1996, 1999, 2007) put forward a very strong proposal that grammar correction has no role to play in L2 writing instruction and thus should be abandoned. The results of the grammar tests and the analysis of participants’ essays in the present project combined

to produce counterevidence against his proposal and, instead, to support Ferris's position (1999, 2004) that selective and prioritized error correction facilitates learners' accuracy in free writing. Although conducted on a very small scale, the present study can be added to a list of studies in support of the position that explicitly and systematically provided grammar feedback can help L2 learners use rule-governed forms accurately (Ferris, 1999, 2004; Sheen, 2007; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). WCF is pedagogically effective and should be utilized in L2 writing courses.

The third research question was related to the issue of how unfocused WCF on a variety of grammatical items might affect the effectiveness of focused WCF. The ANCOVA results indicated that the participants' *focused-only* mean and their *focused-and-unfocused* mean did not differ significantly, suggesting that provision of WCF on a few additional grammatical forms did not seriously interfere with the learners' attention to the major target form. Of course, the absence of a mean difference does not constitute any concrete evidence that the combination of focused and unfocused feedback is more effective for language acquisition than the focused feedback administered independently. However, as stated at the beginning of this paper, considering the limited class time, it is pedagogically more practical to provide feedback not only on one grammatical rule but also on several spontaneous grammatical and lexical errors that EFL learners commit. In this regard, it has been meaningful to confirm that unfocused feedback does not undermine the effect of focused WCF on the major target form. However, prioritization of the major target form above the incidental errors seems to be important. Further research on the same issue is absolutely necessary.

The fourth research question was how the participants perceived the provision of focused and unfocused WCF in paragraph writing tasks. First, as far as this research study was concerned, all participants indicated their desire for teacher feedback. Truscott (1999) stated that learners do not always understand what benefits their language learning and thus objected to Ferris's idea of offering WCF for the reason that learners express their desire for it. However, when all students in a class prefer to receive feedback and there is no clear evidence of a harmful effect, their request or preference might be accommodated in order to enhance their motivation for further studying.

In terms of the type of WCF, the participants indicated their strong preference for correction of grammatical errors, whereas they also appreciated feedback on various other aspects of their writing. All participants in this project answered that they wanted the teacher to correct their grammatical errors. This is in accord with Ferris's report (1995) that the majority of the ESL students preferred to receive grammar feedback and expressed their satisfaction about the fact that they could write more accurately and present ideas more clearly. On the other hand, the students in Ferris's study remembered the teacher's positive comments on their ideas and organization more specifically and vividly. Consequently, it is safe to assume that grammar feedback and content feedback have different functions,

instead of regarding them as opposite instructional plans to trade off with each other.

It is important to note that learners' ESL/EFL background and their English proficiencies have effects on the degree to which they preferred grammar or content feedback. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994, 1996) reported that foreign language students paid more attention to form, whereas ESL students, more proficient in the target language, had a stronger interest in content feedback although they also paid attention to form-focused feedback. Likewise, Montgomery and Baker reported (2007) that students enrolled in ESL writing courses were more likely to prefer grammar feedback than students working on discipline-based papers, the latter being more interested in content and organization feedback. That is, the more advanced and experienced L2 writers are, the more they are concerned about content and organization. The lower proficiency learners tend to write in L2 for the purpose of language practice and need more grammar feedback. The participants in this study were categorized as advanced by the Japanese EFL standards, but many of them still observed in the classroom that their grammar was not perfect or that they had difficulties understanding certain grammatical structures. Consequently, their lack of self-confidence, and/or their awareness that they were writing English paragraphs and essays for the purpose of English practice, might have influenced their responses.

Then, the overwhelming majority indicated their preference to have all errors corrected by the teacher, and the overwhelming majority preferred direct correction. Ferris (2004) stated that indirect feedback, which involves learners in cognitive problem-solving, is more desirable than direct correction. Qi and Lapkin (2001) also proposed that provision of a reformulated form (i.e., another form of indirect correction) has an advantage of inducing learners' efforts to notice their own errors and engage in cognitive processing, which, in turn, is likely to result in long-term acquisition. The questionnaire section of Ferris and Roberts' study (2001), which evaluated the level of explicitness required for the WCF to L2 learners, showed that the most popular error feedback technique for the participants was marking and labeling errors with codes. The findings from the present study contradicted these reports and theories. On the other hand, it must also be noted that Chandler's study (2003) indicated that direct error correction was more effective for improving ESL learners' accuracy in subsequent writings and that Van Beuningen et al. (2012) demonstrated that direct correction had a positive effect on L2 Dutch writers' abilities to write and draft accurately. Further research is needed to provide more solid evidence for or against the use of direct error correction. However, one interpretation is that the participants in the present project, many of whom were not fully confident about their grammar knowledge and dependent on teacher feedback, might have chosen the quicker and surer way of recognizing their errors.

Conclusion

The present study explored a way to integrate both focused and unfocused WCF into an EFL writing course. The results showed that the participants' abilities to use the target grammatical rules in free writing, as well as their explicit knowledge of English grammar, improved significantly after receiving grammar feedback on their weekly paragraphs or essays. The unfocused WCF on a variety of grammatical forms did not seem to undermine the effects of focused WCF for the main target form, either. In terms of their psychological preference, all of the participants indicated their desire to receive feedback on their grammatical errors, and they perceived direct error correction to be the most useful.

The educational implication is that EFL teachers may be advised to provide focused WCF and also to provide unfocused WCF on multiple grammatical points as long as the major target form is prioritized and the number of auxiliary target points is limited to what the students can deal with. The types of feedback (i.e., direct or indirect, explicit or not explicit) should be carefully considered depending on the students' L2 learning backgrounds and proficiency levels, the nature and purpose of instruction (e.g., composition, grammar and writing, general EFL course), and the degree of learners' willingness to spare time and effort for writing tasks. Direct correction was appreciated by the majority of participants in this project because it helped them identify and correct their errors swiftly and accurately. However, it must be remembered that indirect feedback can engage learners in cognitive processing, which is likely to result in long-term acquisition of grammatical forms. This issue has yet to be verified through more extensive and more meticulously designed research studies and continuous first-hand classroom observation.

The present study had various limitations. Although the study produced evidence that unfocused WCF on a variety of grammatical forms did not undermine the effectiveness of focused WCF in a particular teaching context, the absence of negative effects does not mean that the combination of focused and unfocused CF was more effective for L2 learners' overall writing performance or language acquisition. In order to find more solid evidence that unfocused WCF per se is useful and effective, a four-way comparison between focused CF, unfocused CF, focused and unfocused CF, and control condition needs to be conducted.

It is acknowledged that an action research study with a small group of 29 students cannot provide any strong evidence for generalization. Replication studies with larger samples, drawn from several different courses at different universities, need to be conducted. The grammar tests and the criteria for the evaluation of essays should be revised and polished for greater reliability based on repeated research experiences.

For more accurate assessment of essay writing, it is preferable to have participants write the weekly essays in class so that their ability to write online can be evaluated. In this study, the class management constraints forced the researcher to make participants

write and type the scripts at home and submit them at the next class session. However, one practical solution may be to teach in a computer-assisted room so that students can type up their paragraphs and print and submit them to the teacher at the end of the same session.

The effects of different types of WCF (e.g., direct correction, use of codes, description of error types, and provision of reformulated phrases and sentences) must be evaluated more meticulously. The present study's results suggested that the participants were not even clearly aware of the functions and characteristics of each type of WCF. An in-depth inquiry, using unstructured interviews and narrative analysis, might be useful for the assessment of EFL learners' perceptions of different forms of grammar feedback or their responses to teacher feedback.

Despite these limitations, however, the present study has been a small but important step for more concrete and accurate research on multiple issues: the effectiveness of focused and unfocused WCF, the functions of direct and indirect feedback, and learners' perceptions of teacher feedback. Another important issue, which this study did not cover, is the sequence in which content and grammar feedback is provided (see Ashwell (2000) for details). The common practice of providing content-based feedback on the first draft and grammar-focused feedback on the later drafts may be reevaluated. It is necessary to deal with each issue separately in specific classroom contexts with clearly defined student groups.

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